

BEASTS *of* BURDEN™

ANIMAL RITES



EVAN DORKIN  JILL THOMPSON

BEASTS *of* BURDEN™





BEASTS *of* BURDEN™



ANIMAL RITES

Written by

EVAN DORKIN



Art by

JILL THOMPSON



Lettering by

JASON ARTHUR AND JILL THOMPSON

"A DOG AND HIS BOY" COWITTEN BY SARAH DYER



DARK HORSE BOOKS®
MILWAUKIE, OREGON

TO ARCHIE, SWEET AS SUGAR AND TOUGH AS NAILS,
WHO ONCE SLEPT ON EVAN'S FEET ...

—J. T.

FOR SARAH AND EMILY. AND OF COURSE, THE CATS—
CRUSHY, MIMSY, AND THE MUCH-MISSED MR. JINX AND PIXIE.

—E. D.

President and Publisher
MIKE RICHARDSON

Editor
SCOTT ALLIE

Associate Editor
SIERRA HAHN

Assistant Editors
DANIEL CHABON AND FREDDYE LINS

Collection Designer
TINA ALESSI

BEASTS OF BURDEN VOLUME 1: ANIMAL RITES

Text and illustrations of *Beasts of Burden*™ © 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010 Evan Dorkin and Jill Thompson. Dark Horse Books® and the Dark Horse logo are registered trademarks of Dark Horse Comics, Inc. All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the express written permission of Dark Horse Comics, Inc. Names, characters, places, and incidents featured in this publication either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, institutions, or locales, without satiric intent, is coincidental.

This volume reprints the comic-book series *Beasts of Burden* #1–#4 and “Stray” from *The Dark Horse Book of Hauntings*, “The Unfamiliar” from *The Dark Horse Book of Witchcraft*, “Let Sleeping Dogs Lie” from *The Dark Horse Book of the Dead*, and “A Dog and His Boy” from *The Dark Horse Book of Monsters*, all published by Dark Horse Comics.

Published by Dark Horse Books, a division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street | Milwaukie, OR 97222 | darkhorse.com

To find a comics shop in your area, call the Comic Shop Locator Service toll-free at (888) 266-4226.

First edition: June 2010
ISBN 978-1-59582-513-1

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed at Midas Printing International, Ltd., Huizhou, China

NEIL HANKERSON Executive Vice President TOM WEDDLE Chief Financial Officer RANDY STRADLEY Vice President of Publishing
MICHAEL MARTENS Vice President of Business Development ANITA NELSON Vice President of Marketing, Sales, and Licensing
DAVID SCROGGY Vice President of Product Development DALE LAFOUNTAIN Vice President of Information Technology DARLENE
VOGEL Director of Purchasing KEN LIZZI General Counsel DAVEY ESTRADA Editorial Director SCOTT ALLIE Senior Managing
Editor CHRIS WARNER Senior Books Editor DIANA SCHUTZ Executive Editor CARY GRAZZINI Director of Design and Production
LIA RIBACCHI Art Director CARA NIECE Director of Scheduling



STRAY

No one remembers how many nights the summoning took.



Some say as many as five, while others insist he arrived after the very first appeal.

This is understandable, given the fact that dogs aren't exactly known for their keen sense of time.





Sniff Sniff!
Go on. I'm listening.

Well, uh, first it got cold. Really, really cold, even on warm nights.

Then I started smelling things, hearing things like a dog crying.

"At first I thought I was having a nightmare--or that I ate some bad food. But every night it was the same."



Aw, the house was probably just settling.

Can it, pugs.



I heard the cries too, from next door...

It was awful.



Ah, you're both eatin' outta the same bowl. I been walked around the block a few times an' I never heard nothin' crazy like that!

"Neither did my masters. They just thought I was sick. Three vets couldn't find anything wrong with me. The stupid pet psychic found plenty, though..."

But the sounds didn't stop. They just got worse. I've been afraid to sleep in my house, even in the rain!

He was in terrible shape, sir. That's when I called a meeting. And we decided to call for help.



Jack's telling me he needs more affection. More attention.

I am not! I just want a decent night's sleep!

People! Please don't listen to this moron!



Yes, well, it is possible that some great unhappiness took place here. I do sense a cold spot, which often indicates a restless spirit.

Y-Y-YOU MEAN
A GHOST? A F-FOR
REAL DEAD GHOST?

DO YOU ALL GOT WORMS?
GHOSTS AIN'T REAL! THEM'S
JUST STORIES. STUFF THEY TELL
YOU AT THE PUPPY FARM TO
KEEP YOU FROM RUNNIN'
AROUND AT NIGHT.

WE MUST DIG OUT
THE COLD SPOT. THE
PROBLEM LIES BENEATH
THE HOUSE. I AM
SURE OF IT.

UH, MY OWNERS
WON'T LIKE THIS.
THEY'RE VERY
PARTICULAR
ABOUT THEIR
YARD.

YEAH, WELL, REAL OR
NOT, IF I SEE SOME
OLD GHOST, I'LL BITE
IT. I'M NOT AFRAID!

I COULD KILL A
MOLE OR RACCOON
AND THROW IT IN THE
HOLE.

YOU'D LOOK
LIKE A HERO.

UM, NO.
THAT'S
OKAY.

DON'T WORRY,
BOY, ALL WILL
BE WELL SOON.

RABIES. IT'S
GOTTA BE! YOU'RE
ALL NUTS.

...the earth gave up one
of its secrets.

WHITEY, WOULD
YOU PLEASE STOP
SNIFFING MY ASS?
I'M WORKIN'
HERE.

And so they dug
deep down into the
cold earth for what
seemed like hours.
and just when it
seemed they could
dig no further...

oh. uh,
sorry,
Ace...
nervous
habit.

WHOA. HOLD
UP. I SEE
SOMETHIN'.







IT'S ALL RIGHT, TRIxie.

YOU'RE AMONG FRIENDS HERE.

WE WANT TO HELP.

CAN YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU GOT HERE?



I... came such a long way...

My family was moving cross-country, but I got lost chasing a cat. I found my way back, but they were gone.



For months I trailed their faint scent.

Finally, just when I was about to give up, I tracked them to this neighborhood.

I ran the last few yards to the house, but in my excitement I failed to notice the car.

The driver read my tags, reeking of beer. Afraid that he'd killed his new neighbor's dog, he panicked and buried me in his yard.

But I wasn't dead, yet. I awoke in the dark, where I've been all these years...



...waiting for someone to answer my cry for help. Thank you, all of you. Now I'm free to rejoin my family at last. It won't be hard to find them this time...





NO ONE SPOKE AFTER SHE'D GONE.

they buried her remains in silence.



YOU'LL HAVE NO MORE TROUBLES NOW. THIS DOG-HOUSE IS CLEAN.

I THINK WE'D ALL BEST GO HOME, NOW, BEFORE THIS STORM GETS WORSE.

YES, SIR. AND THANK YOU, SIR.

They padded off to their homes and hideaways, wondering if it had all been a dream.



Wondering what it would be like when the black dog came to claim them.

But Jack could only think of sleep.



ALL RIGHT, COME ON.



And how wonderful it was to have his house back.

THE END



THE UNFAMILIAR

















AND ONE MORE THING.
KEEP YOUR TAIL DOWN
OR THEY'LL KNOW YOU'RE
NOT A GIRL.

ALL I WANNA
KNOW IS, HOW DO YOU
GET ME OUTTA THERE
WHEN IT ALL GOES
DOWN?



I
DON'T
KNOW.

WHAT? FORGET
THIS! I'M OUTTA
HERE!

ACE. WOULD
YOU HELP ME
A MOMENT?



DYMPHNA! YOU
BAD KITTY! YOU
ALMOST RUINED
EVERYTHING!

UH, S-SORRY.
DID I MISS
THE SACRIFICE?

DYMPHNA?
YOUR
VOICE--

HUH? HACK
OH- HACK.

HAIRBALLS.

NOW THAT WE'RE
FINALLY ALL HERE,
WE CAN PROCEED WITH
THE INVOCATION.



SISTERS!
ENTER THE
CIRCLE!



BELoved
SEKHMET--

GREAT ONE
OF MAGIC--

MOTHER
OF THE
NETJERU.

Giver of
Ecstasies.

SATISFIER
OF DeSires!

THE ORPHAN COULD
BARELY WATCH THE VILE
CEREMONY THAT FOLLOWED,
A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS
BLUR OF BLOOD, AWKWARD
DANCING, AND GIBBERISH.



I SUMMON
THEE, GLORIOUS
SEKHMET!

ARISE!

DELIVER US
OUR DESTINY!
LET US RESHAPE
THE WORLD IN
YOUR MOST
HOLY NAME!

OH YOU
LYING DOGGY
SONS OF--

CRAP!
THE SPELL
WORKED!

DON'T BE
SO SURE.

oooH...
Whitey
threw
UP.

NOW, MY WAYWARD
CHILDREN! THOU
SHALT COME
TO THE
HOUSE OF
RA!

THERE I SHALL
TEACH YOU TO
PROPERLY
WORSHIP SEKHMET,
THE DEVOURING ONE
WHO REDUCETH ALL
TO SILENCE!

WHOA! THEM'S
CONSEQUENCES!

Y-YEAH! AN' THE
ORPHAN'S RIGHT
IN THE MIDDLE
OF IT!

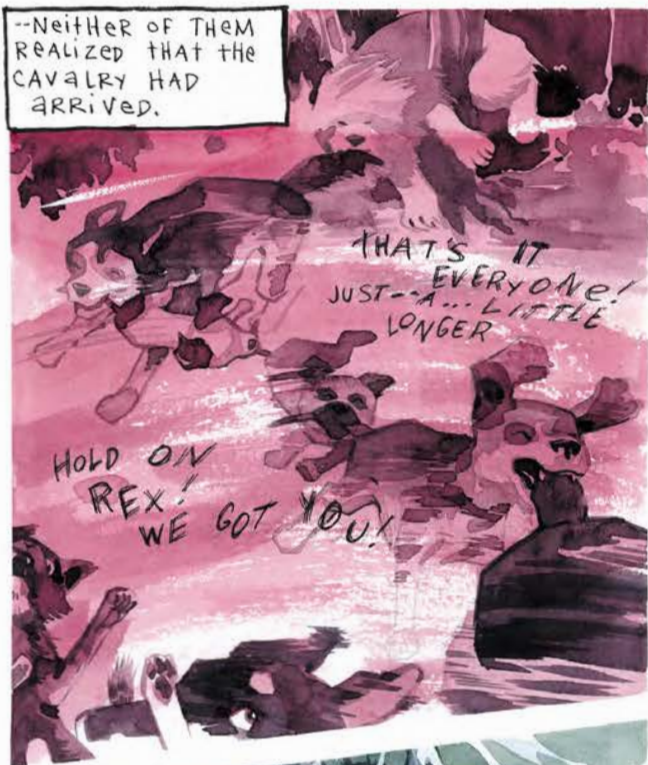
HEY, LADY! I'M
NOT WITH THEM!
I DON'T WANNA
GO TO YOUR
STUPID HOUSE
OF RA!

AAAAH!

SNAP

REX?

MY
HERO!





**LET SLEEPING
DOGS LIE**

Big or Small...



Short or Tall...



Here's what happens
to us all...

We go to sleep,
We close our eyes...



And Leave behind
a nest of flies.

TRADITIONAL CANINE VERSE
— AUTHOR UNKNOWN





AS THE GREAT DOG
DUG THE LAKES AND
MOUNTAINS TO COVER
THOSE LOST IN THAT
GREAT BATTLE...

...SO WE LAY YOU
TO REST BENEATH
THE GROUND HE
HAS GIVEN US.



THE BLACK DOG
HAS TAKEN YOU
INTO HER PACK,
AS SHE COMES
FOR US ALL.

MAY SHE LEAD
YOU TO THE
BETTER PLACE--

WHERE THE
GREAT DOG SITS,
WHERE YOU WILL
NEVER AGAIN KNOW
PAIN OR SICKNESS
OR HARDSHIP.

AND MAY HE WHO
IS ABOVE ALL CALL
YOU BY NAME TO RUN
FREE IN HIS END-
LESS FIELDS.





I JUST DON'T
GET IT. DON'T
THEY LOOK?

THE STREETS
ARE BAD ENOUGH.
BUT THE ROADS?
YOU GOTTA BE
CRAZY OR
SOMETHING.

OF COURSE
YOU
DON'T GET IT,
REX.

YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT'S LIKE ON
YOUR OWN. NONE
OF YOU DO.

YOU GET
HUNGRY.
TIRED.

A
LITTLE
STUPID.

maybe
a little
crazy.

YOU JUST
WANT TO GET
TO THE NEXT
PLACE...

WHERE THERE
MIGHT BE FOOD
OR SHELTER.

OR
SOMEONE
TO TALK
TO.

SOMETIMES YOU DON'T
CARE. YOU JUST GO.

AND
WHATEVER
HAPPENS...
... happens

....
Say ... uh...
anybody
wanna bat a
ball around or
something?





"AFTER YOU DESTROYED MY SISTERS, I VOWED I WOULD HAVE MY REVENGE.

"I DISCOVERED YOUR BURIAL GROUND WHILE SPYING ON YOU, AND GATHERED A SPELL KIT FROM MY LATE MASTER'S LAIR--"

Verti tirigmo
das fantu
deshme--

--TO CREATE
AN ARMY OF
THE DEAD THAT
WOULD KILL
YOU ALL.

"ALONE I COULD
ONLY RAISE A
FEW OF THE
UNDEAD. BUT THEY
WERE ENOUGH
TO SERVE MY
PURPOSES."

BUH-
BUH

HEAR ME,
YOU DAMNED
MONGRELS!
I HAVE BROUGHT
YOU BACK AS MY
INSTRUMENTS
OF REVENGE
AGAINST THOSE
WHO...

BB-BRAAP'ins





CLOSE THE
GATE, REX.

CLOSE THE
GATE, REX.



CLOSE
THE GODDAMNED
GATE, REX!



STUPID CAT!
HADDA GO AN'
RAISE THE
DEAD, HUH?!

YOU SMELL
THAT? DEATH!
WALKIN', BREATHING
DEATH!

EVERYONE,
CALM DOWN. IT'S A
NEW GATE. MY OWNERS
JUST BOUGHT IT --
THERE'S NO WAY
THEY CAN --

SKRAAK



GUYS,
LOOK!

SO WHAT?
SHE'S ONLY
GETTIN'
WHAT SHE
DESERVES!

C'MON, PUGS,
YOU KNOW WE
CAN'T LET THAT
HAPPEN --



BESIDES, I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR ANY MORE FUNERALS, TODAY !

WE'RE WITH YOU, ACE!



YUCCH! DEB DOG TATHTTE LIKE THIT!

STOP! DON'T BITE THEM! AND DON'T LET THEM BITE YOU! OR YOU'LL BECOME ONE OF THEM!



PTOO!
PTOOIE! NOW SHE TELLS US!

I don't understand...
...You saved me, even though I...

DON'T GET MUSHY, SISTER. NOBODY'S SAFE UNTIL YOU TELL ME HOW TO STOP THOSE THINGS.









JESUS, FRANK!
WE HIT A DOG!
WE HIT A LOT
OF DOGS!

SHUT UP AN' KEEP
DRIVIN'! HALF THE
PEOPLE UP HERE'S
ANIMAL FREAKS
AN' THE OTHER
HALF'S LAWYERS!



You guys
remember
when this
was a quiet
neighborhood?



WONDER WHY
SHE DID IT? I
THOUGHT SHE
WANTED US
DEAD.

CRAZY KID. MAYBE
IN HER NEXT LIFE
SHE'LL WISE UP AN'
STAY AWAY FROM
THAT WITCH
CRAP.



HEY, PEOPLE
ALERT! WE
BETTER HIGH-
TAIL IT.



HEY,
ORPHAN!
COME
ON!

...yeah
yeah...



"It is nought good
A sleeping hound
to wake."

-Chaucer, "Troilus
and Criseyde"

THE END





A DOG AND HIS BOY



WINTER HAD ARRIVED IN BURDEN HILL, THE NUMBING COLD SLOWING LIFE DOWN AND BRINGING A WELCOME PEACE AND QUIET TO THE RECENTLY TROUBLED NEIGHBORHOOD.

PUGS!!
Hey, PUGS!

FOR A TIME, at Least.



PUGS,
you Gotta
come see
this!

Whitey?!
Are you crazy,
buggin' me this
EARLY--

oh, Quit
CRABBIN' and
come ON, will
ya?



Rex!
Something's
up at
Ace's!

NOW
What?

don't ask
me. I'm still
ASLEEP.





he smells weird. kind of doggy-like.

Well, DUH, whitey, he's in a doghouse.

I just smell blood. Human blood.



Looks like he's been in a fight.

Yeah, and lost. Big time.

Ahem! Excuse me?



Sorry, but I don't appreciate people saying stuff about me like I'm not even here.



Great dog in Heaven...

It talks.



OF COURSE I talk. SO WHAT?

WELL... don't you think it's STRANGE, I mean, YOUR talking to US?

LOTS of STUFF talks to me. RIVERS, BIRDS, TREES.

my PEOPLE say EVERYTHING SPEAKS, BUT not EVERYONE LISTENS.



YOUR PEOPLE?

you mean WITCHES, RIGHT?

I'm on to YOU, WITCH BOY!



PUGSLEY!

the ONLY HUMANS we ever heard SPEAKIN' in animal tongues BEFORE was WITCHES!

ARE you CRAZY? I'm not a witch!

oh, yeah, RIGHT, Like A WITCH would tell the TRUTH!

I say we call the WISE DOG to check this WITCH out--



NO, wait! Don't call anyone, PLEASE!



Look, I'm SORRY if I messed up your house. I needed to get out of the cold.

Just let me REST here a while. PLEASE.

you Gotta understand...

I RAN AWAY FROM home...

AND I'd RATHER DIE than GO BACK there.



AS SOON AS IT WAS DARK they WENT ABOUT GROOMING and feeding the STRANGE BOY.

the ORPHAN knew of several SLEEPING PLACES that offered FREE CLOTHES.



AFTERWARDS, Ace and the Boy stayed up the rest of that night, speaking in low tones about their lives and life itself.

the Boy told the story of his childhood and family, most of it unpleasant and cruel.

Life on the road wasn't much easier. He'd met all sorts, some worse than others.

then there was the girl in Des Moines.

She said she was a tattoo artist.

She was interested in his skin.

the next thing he remembered was waking up miles away in the woods, sick as a dog, a fresh tattoo on his chest as strange as the girl who had given it to him.

the Boy was more eager to tell the stories behind his other tattoos, of raven and eagle and other figures from the legends of his tribe.

Ace, in turn, told the Boy about the Great Dog in his endless fields.

And the Black Dog, Shepherdess of the dead, who fetches the souls of the departed.

A full-page illustration in a comic book style. The scene is set in a snowy, mountainous landscape. In the upper left, a boy with dark hair and a grey jacket is shown from the chest up, hugging a large husky dog. The husky has white fur with dark patches around its eyes and ears. The boy's eyes are closed, and he has a peaceful expression. In the upper right, another husky is shown from the chest up, looking towards the left. In the middle left, the boy is sitting on the snow, surrounded by several other dogs: a small brown dog, a small orange cat, and a small white dog. He is holding a small white dog in his arms. In the middle right, a boy is sitting on the snow, surrounded by several dogs, including a large white dog with black spots and a small white dog. He is holding a small white dog in his arms. In the lower left, a boy is walking away from the viewer, carrying a large dog on his back. In the lower right, a boy is sitting on the snow, surrounded by several dogs, including a large white dog with black spots and a small white dog. He is holding a small white dog in his arms. The background shows snow-covered mountains and a cloudy sky.

by the time sleep overtook them,
Both Ace and the Boy felt as if they
had discovered a long-lost brother.

the weeks that
followed were the
happiest either of
them had ever known.

When the sun ruled the sky, the
boy hid, and slept, and recovered
his strength, shuttled between
doghouses, garages, and sheds.

And when the moon took
its place amongst the night
stars, he roamed free with
his newfound friends.

Although Pugsley never
quite got over his
suspicions, he had to admit
that Myrna's pup would
have died if it had not
been for the boy.

No one ever said it aloud,
but they all knew it. He
had become one of them.

BUT THEN, ALMOST OVERNIGHT, A CHANGE CAME OVER THE BOY.



HIS OLD NIGHTMARES RETURNED, BLACK AND RED VISIONS OF THE GIRL AND THE WOODS AND FACELESS MEN CHASING HIM FOR SOMETHING HE DIDN'T DO.



HE GREW MOODIER AND MORE RESTLESS WITH EACH PASSING NIGHT, AND INCREASINGLY PARANOID THAT HIS NIGHTMARES WERE SOMEHOW BECOMING REALITY.



SOME NIGHTS HE REFUSED TO LEAVE THE YARD, WHILE ON OTHERS HE'D GO OFF ALONE, COMING BACK DIRTY AND DISHEVELED AND UNWILLING TO SPEAK ABOUT WHERE HE HAD BEEN.



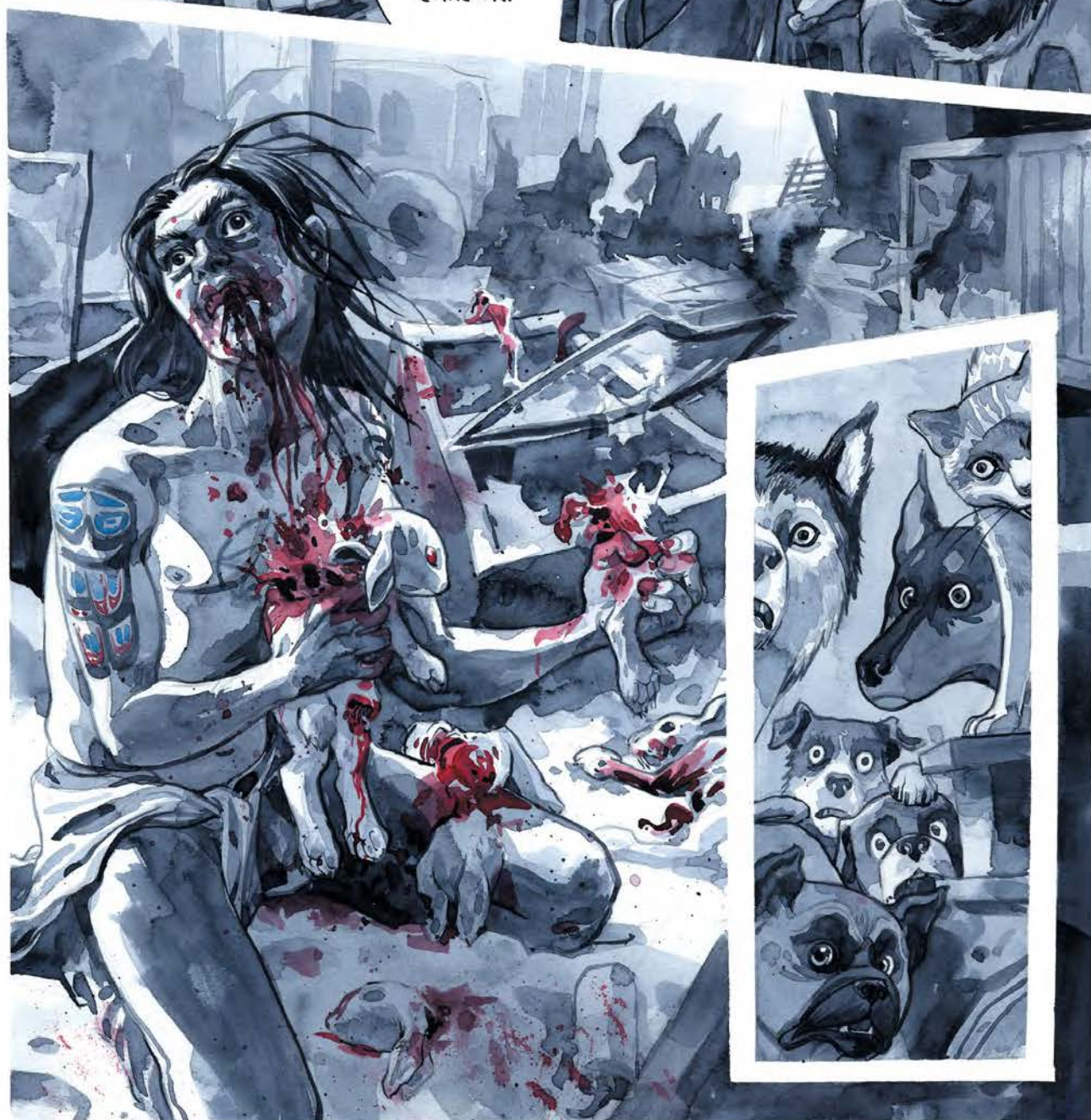
ONE NIGHT, HE DIDN'T COME BACK AT ALL.

--WELL, MAYBE HE JUST MOVED ON?

YEAH, AND MAYBE HE'S HURT! YOU KNOW HOW STRANGE HE'S BEEN ACTING--

PSSST!





the next Night...



told you that kid was freaky. we shoulda done this the minute we saw him.

Shut it, pugs.



um, it's a summon--

we're calling for a friend of ours to visit us. we have to howl loud enough so he'll hear because we never know where he is or how far away.

hey, guys. what's all the shouting about?

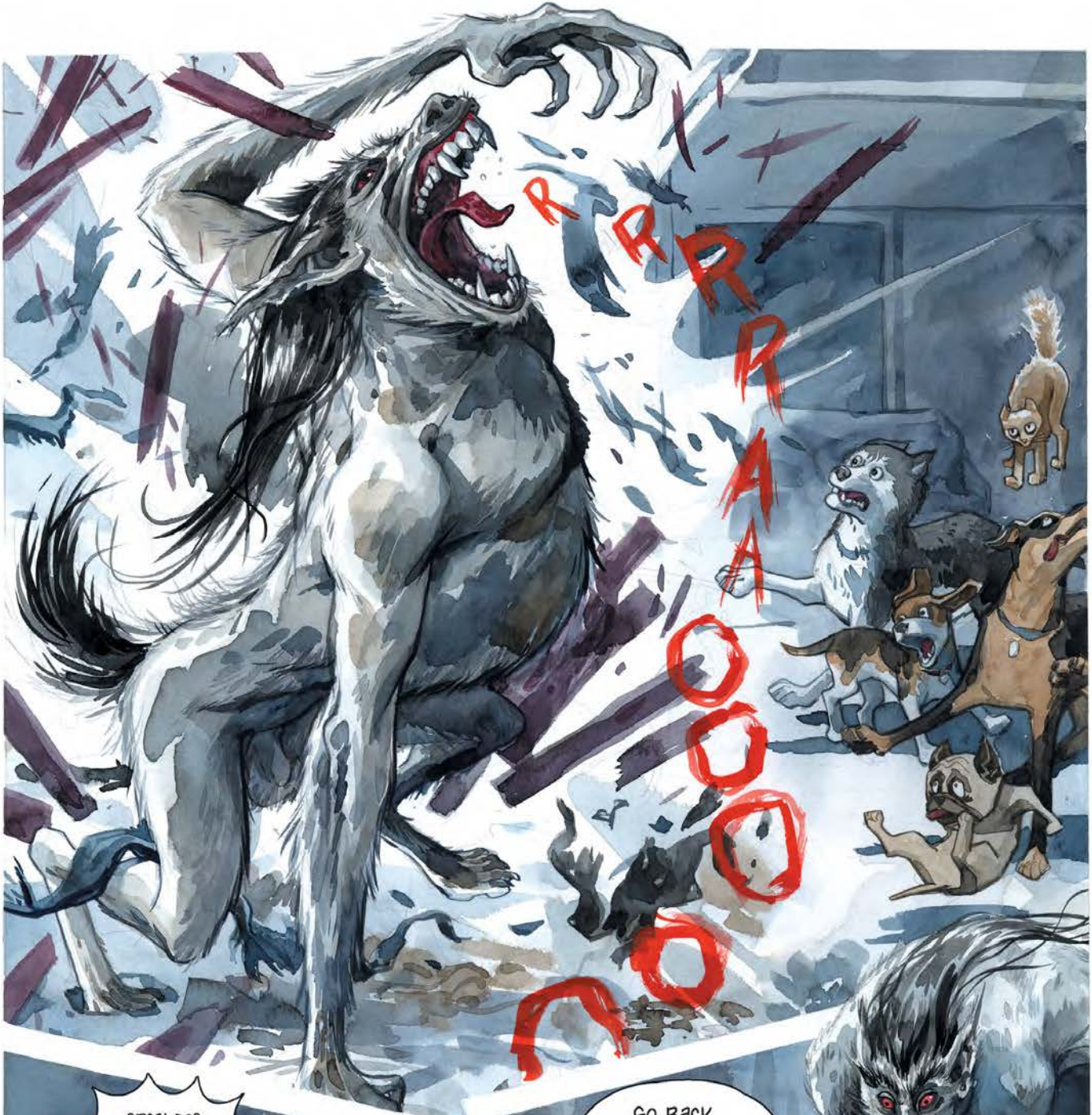
oh. i see.

what?

i was just trying to h-h-hrrrk--

-ahurrrrk-coff coff--





GREAT DOG,
BURY MY ASS...
he AIN'T NO
Witch--

H-he's A
WEREWOLF!

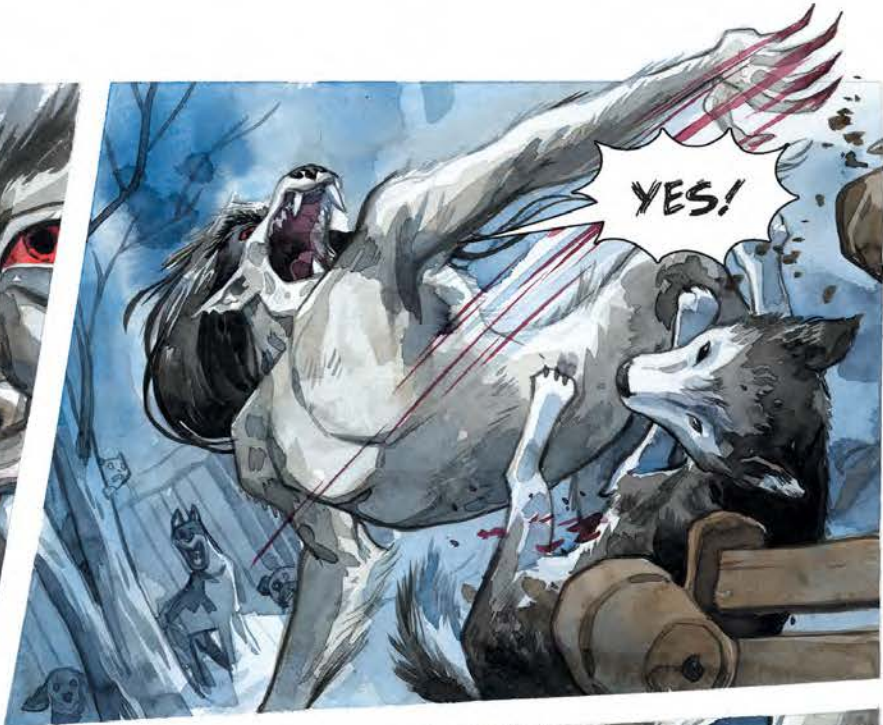


GO BACK
WHERE YOU CAME
FROM. LET THE BOY
ALONE, YOU HEAR
ME --



the boy
is asleep,
lost in red
dreams.
there is
only me.

No!



YES!



I'm letting
you live, because
you've been
good to us.

Cross my path
again and I will
eat you, bones
and all.



AAA
WROOOO



Ace!
No! there's
nothing you
can do!

they knew it was
hopeless to try
and stop ace.

After all, dogs are
nothing if not loyal.



the creature
HAD GOTTEN FAR
AHEAD OF THEM,
SPURRED ON
BY A HIDEOUS
SUPERNATURAL
STRENGTH AND
NEED.

BUT EVEN A
HUMAN COULD
FOLLOW THE
OBVIOUS TRAIL.



did you
hear that?
sounded
like a
gunshot!

MONSTROUS PAW PRINTS IN THE SNOW,
THE AIR HEAVY WITH THE SCENT OF
WOLF AND URINE, AND FINALLY...



...death.

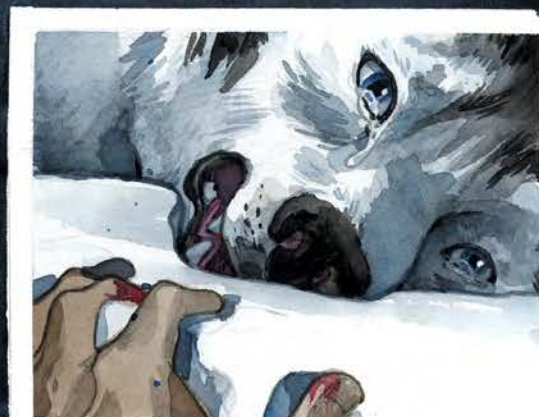


Ace, we have
to get out of
here.

We can't save
that man... we
can't save
anyone--













What your friend did was very brave.



yeah.

If only I could have gotten there sooner...

Perhaps I would have been able to do more for them.



As it is I'm only an apprentice, not a wise dog. My healing skills are not very far along.

Please... you did so much for us.



We'll always be grateful to you.



that winter was the harshest anyone could remember on the hill.

No one left home without their owners.

Nobody spoke about the boy who could talk.

And nothing howled save for the wind.

THE
END



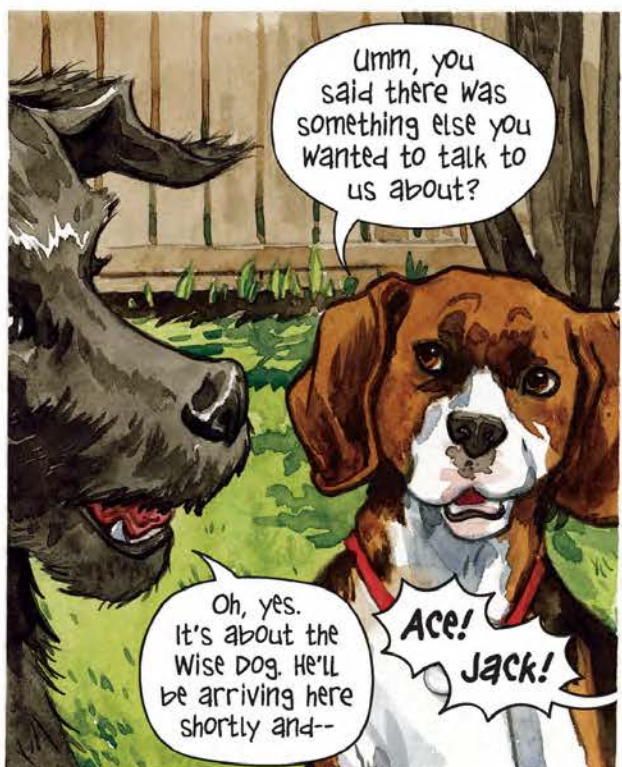
THE GATHERING STORM



















That's his, all right.



I don't get it. No sign of a fight...

or of Pee-Wee.

Could the frogs have anything to do with this?

I don't see how--



We have to look for him. He could be hurt, or--

We'll split into three groups. Jack and I'll take the main path.

Rex, you and the cats head uphill.



If anyone sees anything, let up a howl!









That's
Rex--!



What
happened?
Where's
Rex--?

Not a
clue. We've
been looking
since we got
here, but--

Hey,
guys!
Over here!
Quick!

I dunno
what's wrong
wit' 'em--they're
shakin' like chihuahuas
and not makin' a
lick of sense!

Rex...
Orphan...
What
happened?
Where's
Fluffy?



Fluffy!
It got her!
Sh-she was
there, and then
she wasn't there,
and then it was
eating her!



Hey, lady!
Stop! Don't go
in there!

It's in
there!



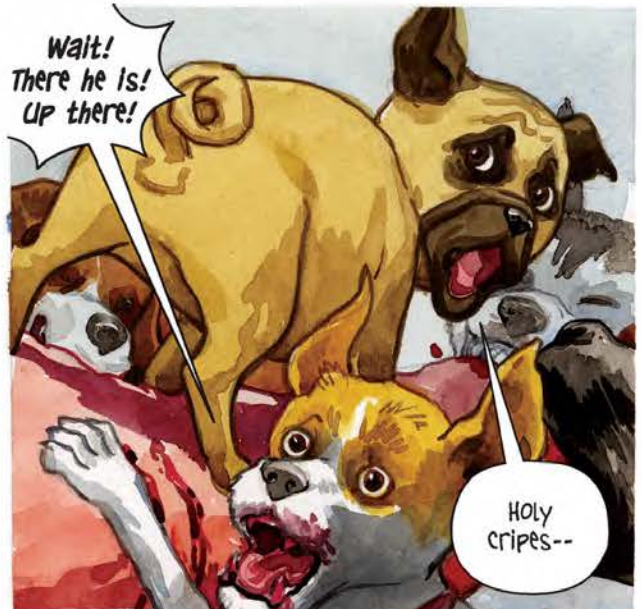


















And watch-cat.





Look, no disrespect, your wiseness, but we've had enough trouble without lookin' for it on purpose! Lookit what happened to Pee-Wee an' Fluffy!

Besides, we ain't *Wise Dogs!* We're just plain *regular dogs!*



Do you *really* believe that? After all you've seen and done?



And after your friend here was bitten by a werewolf, blessing him with abilities no Wise Dog has ever had?



Something is wrong in Burden Hill.

Some unknown entity is at work here, attracting other malevolent forces to this territory.

This evil needs to be tracked down and destroyed.



The Society is not what it once was, in numbers or in strength. We need your help to save Burden Hill.

Can we depend on you?



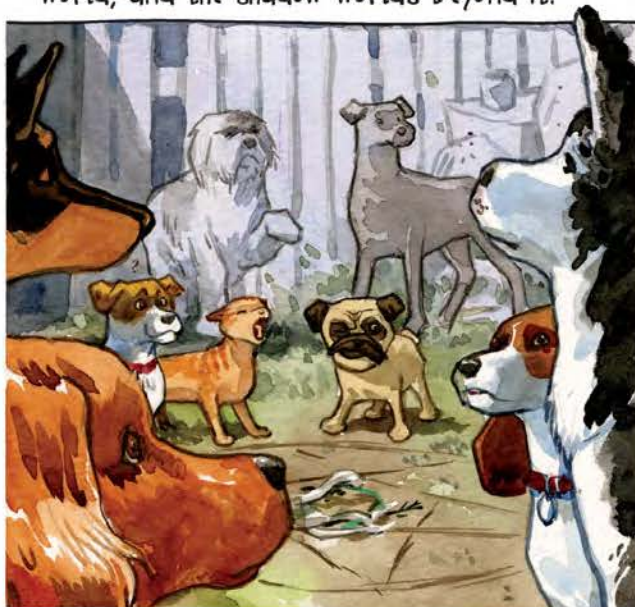


LOST

It had been an eventful spring for the newly appointed defenders of Burden Hill.



Under the tutelage of the Wise Dogs, they were initiated into the mysteries of the natural world, and the shadow worlds beyond it.



This newfound knowledge had been put to good use...



...on a number of occasions.



Still, they had only taken a few steps on this strange new path--



--and there were many things they were not yet prepared to deal with...













Devil's Well,
huh? Devil's Ass
is more like it.

This place
sucks.

I hear **people**
won't even come
here anymore.



I don't
blame them.
My grandpa used
to tell stories about
the well that would
curl your tail.

Any-
thing?



Scared up
some squirrels
and a fat old
raccoon, but no
sign of 'em.

Well, that's a **good** thing,
right? I mean, what would
them kids be doin' out
here, anyway?



That raccoon
was just **shinin'** ya,
you know you can't
trust any of them
thieves.



Maybe...





























Despite their fears,
no one ever came
for Rex and Ace.



Jack awoke two days later, howling as if
the Black Dog herself was at his heels.



They would never
know exactly what
happened, or why.



They only knew they'd be
haunted by that night
for the rest of their lives.

Perhaps even longer.



The End



**SOMETHING WHISKERED
THIS WAY COMES**













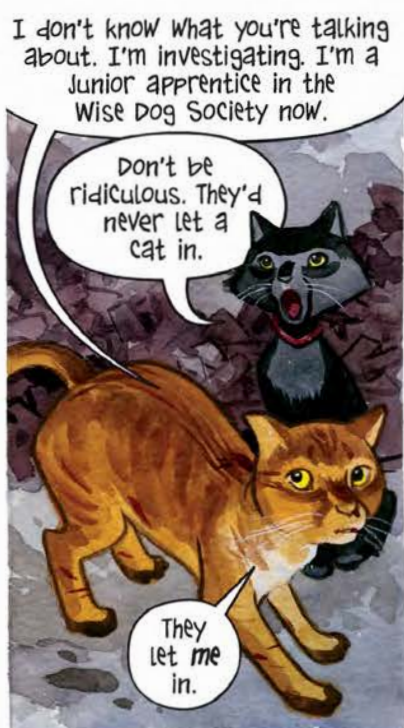


























Where
the hell are
we going?

Hold on--
Haak! Hakk!
I'm looking for
something--

There! See
those marks?
It's a bolt hole!
Come on!

What's
a bolt
hole?

An escape
route, in case
an entrance is
blocked. Most rat
chambers have them.
If we're lucky, it'll
take us to a
main tunnel.

Hey!

I think
there's an
opening up
ahead--

I see
light!

Blessed
Sekhmet! Caff!
Hakk!! I don't
think I can go on
much longer--

SKREEEK
SKREEEE
SKREEEK

There's
an exit!

C'mon,
Dymphna! We're
almost outta
here!

SKREEOW!

SKREEEK!









GRAVE HAPPENINGS



If you ask *me*,
she should be chased
clear back to wherever
the hell she came
from.

She's
just no damn
good.



I dunno, Pugs.
I mean, she's creepy
an' all...but the Orphan
vouches for her. She told us
all about the rat army,
didn't she?

Pfft!
For all we know,
they're working
together!



Maybe that's where she
disappears to at night,
to report back to her
rat masters--

Don't be
ridiculous,
Pugs.

Really.
I think you're
being way too hard
on Dymphna.

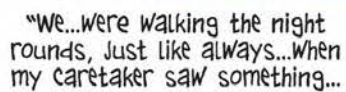




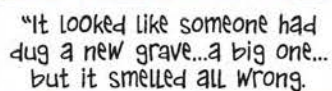




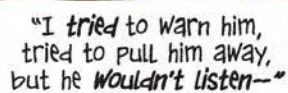




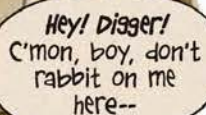
"We...were walking the night rounds, just like always...when my caretaker saw something...



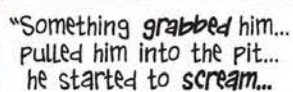
"It looked like someone had dug a new grave...a big one... but it smelled all wrong.



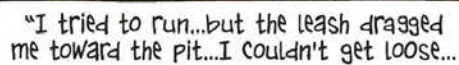
"I tried to warn him, tried to pull him away, but he wouldn't listen--"



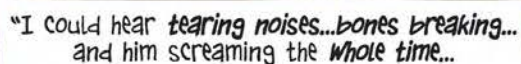
Hey! Digger! C'mon, boy, don't rabbit on me here--



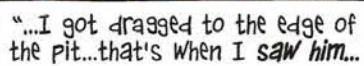
"Something grabbed him... pulled him into the pit... he started to scream...



"I tried to run...but the leash dragged me toward the pit...I couldn't get loose...



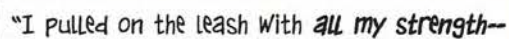
"I could hear tearing noises...bones breaking... and him screaming the whole time...



"...I got dragged to the edge of the pit...that's when I saw him...



"...in pieces...dirt and bone and blood, like the ground itself was tearin' him apart...



"I pulled on the leash with all my strength--







OH, MAN! I
CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
HOW AWESOME IS
THIS?!

I'M BACK!

AND IT
LOOKS LIKE CHERYL
GOT ME EVERYTHING
I ASKED FOR--

UGH. FEEL
KINDA STIFF, THOUGH.
GUESS YOU GOTTA EXPECT
THAT. STILL--

OH, NO
WAY... YOU
GUYS?!

I MEAN, I PRACTICED
THE FAITH! WE DID EVERY-
THING ACCORDING TO THE
RULES OF SERVICE--

ONLY,
I EXPECTED TO
SEE MY FELLOW
BELIEVERS.

NOT
EMISSARIES.

I-I DON'T
KNOW WHAT TO
SAY! ONLY THAT IF
I'VE BEEN FOUND
WORTHY...

I AM
TOTALLY READY
TO SERVE!!

HEY, WHAT
ARE YOU
POINTING AT?











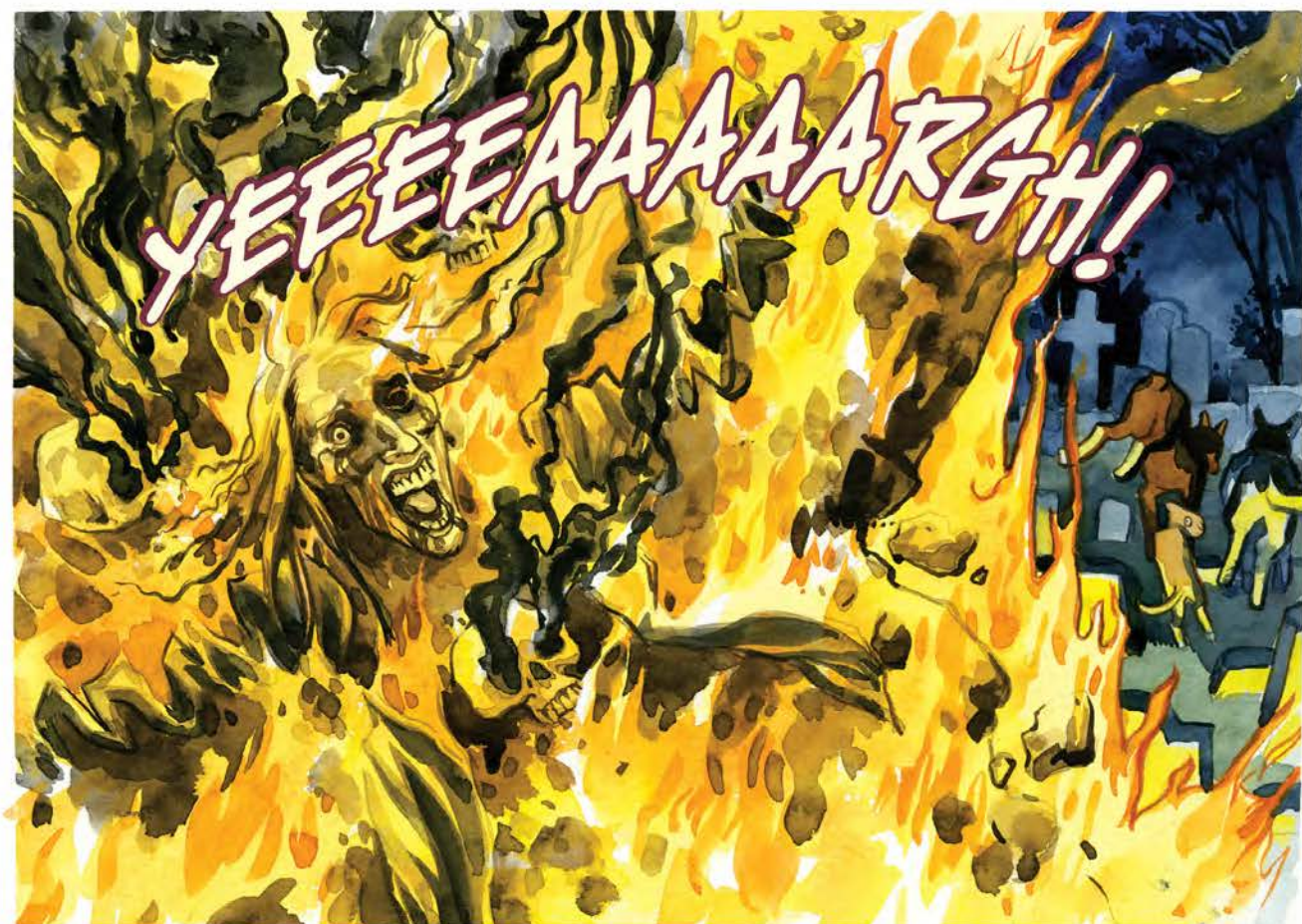
















God,
that was
horrible.

That was
necessary.

I wonder
what the humans
are gonna make
of this.

Hell, I was
here and I don't get
what happened.

What's to
understand?
We *won!* An' that
creep's deader'n
day-old kibble!

If only it were that simple.
That human didn't resurrect
himself. *Something* sent those
creatures for him...

Something
connected to the
voice in the
sewers.

Things are on the
move. Terrible
things.

What the
hell does *that*
mean?

It means we
may have won
the fight--



--but the
war's just
began.

The End

AFTERWORD

IN 2003 SCOTT ALLIE ASKED ME if I would be interested in contributing to a horror anthology he was putting together called *The Dark Horse Book of Hauntings*. I was more than interested, because it was an opportunity to do something I'd always wanted to do in comics, which was to write a horror story. No, not a horrible story—I'd already written a batch of those. A horror story. Creepy, ooky, mysterious, spooky, that sort of thing. I also really needed the work.

I wanted to write a haunted-house story, but not along traditional lines. After a few false starts I hit on the idea of a haunted *doghouse*, which became my pitch for "Stray." Scott liked it and wanted me to draw it. I draw animals about as well as I breakdance, but Scott believed in me. Which was really nice. Luckily for us all, I convinced him to approach Jill Thompson instead.

I wrote "Stray" with Jill's art in mind, specifically the lovely watercolors she painted for her *Scary Godmother* books. I wanted "Stray" to have that storybook feel, and I knew Jill could render the animals beautifully and, perhaps more importantly, believably. I was thrilled—thrilled, I tell you—when Jill agreed to illustrate "Stray." She also asked that I put a Pug in the cast, something else I'm eternally grateful for. I can't picture this series without Jill—or Pugs, for that matter.

"Stray" was a single short story, only eight pages long. There were no further adventures planned for these characters. But the response to the story was very positive, and eventually our "Stray" gave birth to a litter of three more anthology stories, each one longer than the last, until "A Dog and His Boy" came in at twenty pages, practically a complete comic. While working on that story, Scott, Jill, and I started talking about doing a dedicated series with

the characters. That's when we realized we didn't actually have a name for our series. Up to that point we generally referred to it as "those dog and cat stories Jill and Evan are doing." We considered several titles, some seriously (*Animal Rites*, *Animal Tales*—both problematic), some not so seriously (*Power Dogs*, *Animal Investigation Team Fight! Fight! Fight!*). And, courtesy of Sarah, *Pugs and His Pals*. *Beasts of Burden* was the best I could come up with, which is why I named the town Burden Hill in the last short story. We're all used to it now, and only a few people have groaned out loud because of it.

So, that's how we got here. I still can't believe it's been seven years since we started, that Jill agreed to partner up with me on it, or that readers have taken to what we've been doing so enthusiastically. My sincere thanks to Scott Allie for making all this happen, for his support and guidance, and for his patience in putting up with me. Thanks also to Sierra Hahn and Freddye Lins for making things happen (and also for putting up with me), to Mike Richardson for his early and enthusiastic support of these stories, to Jason Arthur for his swell lettering work, and, of course, to Jill for her incredible work in bringing Burden Hill to life. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Sarah Dyer, who collaborated with me on the script for "A Dog and His Boy" and whose input helped immeasurably throughout the series. How she puts up with me, I do not know.

Well, that's it for now. I hope you've enjoyed your time in Burden Hill, and I hope you'll be back with us again sometime soon.

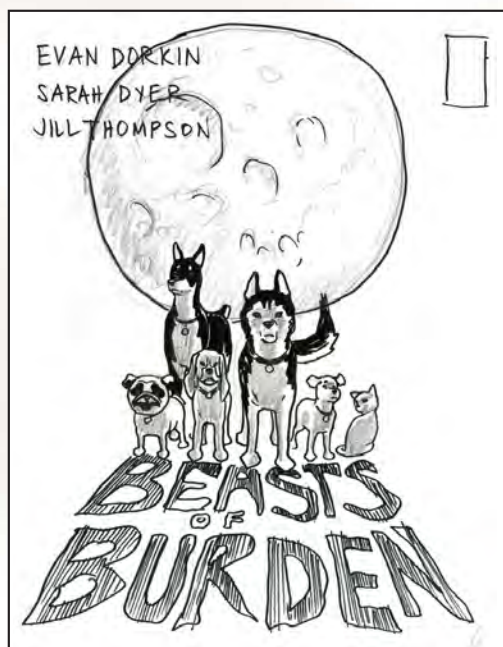
Evan Dorkin
Staten Island, New York
January 28, 2010

SKETCHBOOK

WITH NOTES BY JILL THOMPSON



These are some of my cover sketches for *Beasts of Burden* #1 ("The Gathering Storm," the fifth story in this book). I usually don't do such detailed sketches, as it tends to take the wind out of my sails when I get to the painting part. The more finished the sketch, the more I feel like I've already finished the piece! Funny!



I was inspired by old-fashioned "boys' adventure" books for all of my cover designs here—with the exception of the third one, which kinda looked like a *Dawn of the Dead* poster once I got done with it, and that's probably why it was not chosen by Scott or Evan! *Ha!* I am a huge fan of using the white of the paper as a design element, and sketches #1 and #3 would have had completely white backgrounds . . . The final cover to the first issue is on the facing page.





The End

This is the finished page based on the thumbnail opposite. After some minor panel rearrangement and some tweaks to body language to keep the reader's eye moving where I wanted it, I was good to go!



Some more cover sketches, for the second issue ("Lost," the sixth chapter in this book). You can see that I got looser in my layout here, abandoning the inked step. I wanted to keep my energies inside and have them come out in the painting and not in the preliminary work. I'm an impatient person in certain respects. Mostly when I draw. Oh, okay—in much of everything! I like my gratification instantly! That's probably why watercolor is a perfect medium for my self-expression. You can't go back in and monkey around with it much after the fact. Boom—you put it down and it's there, with *just a liiiiittle* time to fool with it and make it do what you require, and then your window of opportunity is closed. Oils drive me crazy—I shmoosh them and smear them and they never dry—and acrylics? They dry fast like plastic, and I can't manipulate them as much as I like. And I want my results *right now!!* (Where's a smiley-face emoticon when you need it?)

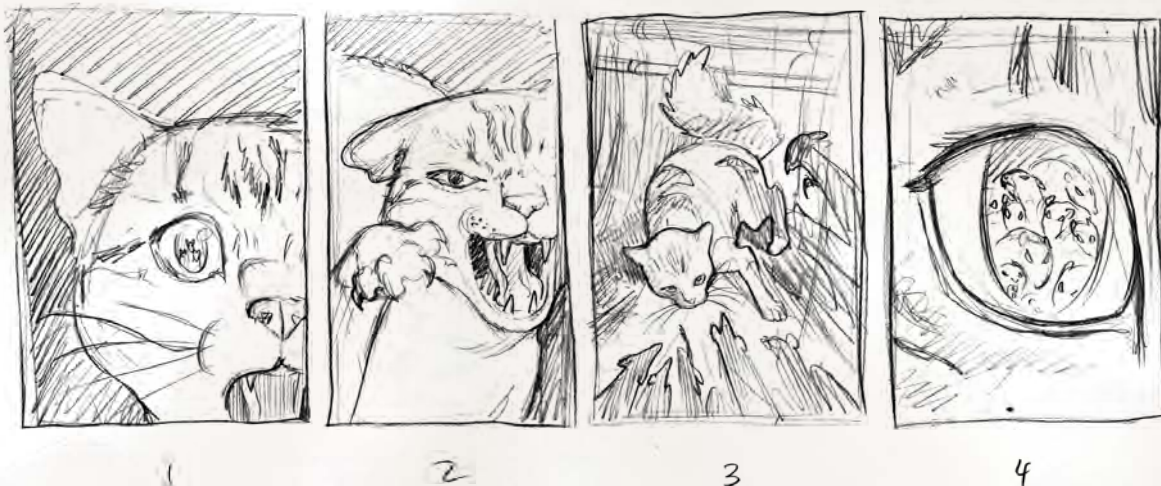




The Swifties cat gang. Even though we saw these guys for only two panels in "Something Whiskered This Way Comes," I knew we'd be seeing them again, so I wanted to draw some kit-kats that were differently patterned than the Orphan and Dymphna. And something that would not be too difficult to paint over and over again. Muggsy's and Johnny Whiskers's fur will probably have me cursing sometime in the future, but I rarely see a calico cat, and I wanted to include one of those. And Johnny Whiskers? He's based on dear, departed Lucien (or Lukey Lucan as I used to call him), one of the best felines to ever chirp and eat grasshoppers and walk the face of the earth.

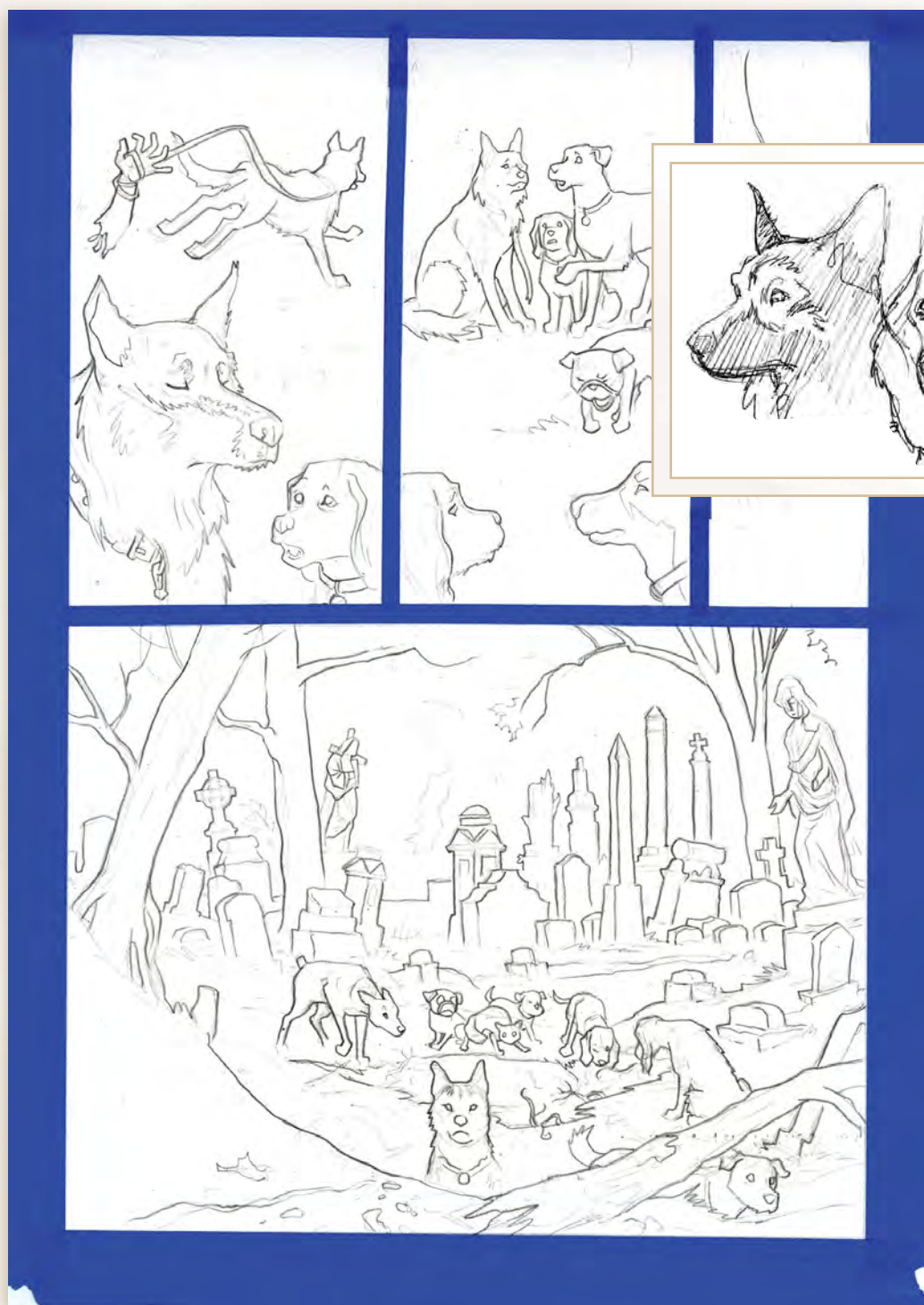
The Orphan is based on Sammy, a spunky, rough 'n' tumble ginger cat who lives across the street. And the Getaway Kid is George, from a few doors down.

Below, pencil sketches for the cover of "Something Whiskered." Even though I liked all the designs, I really was pulling for the fourth one—the close-up of the cat's eye with the rats reflected in it . . .









FACING: Cover to the fourth issue, "Grave Happenings."

INSET, TOP RIGHT: Ballpoint-pen doodle of Digger, the graveyard dog. That was sketched right on the top of the script.

ABOVE: This is a page ready to be painted. This is what I consider a tightly penciled page. The blue painter's tape keeps my edges and panel borders crisp. I don't really shade in any dark areas with pencil so much anymore. Maybe I should—it would force me to be bolder in value choices right off the bat . . . Must be gettin' lazy!

LITTLE MONSTERS -

DIRT GOBLINS

CLUMPS

CLODS

DIRT CLODS

hard
ROCK CLAW

use rocks/branches to dig

GENE

roots
broken into
casket
SYMBOL ON
IT INSIDE



flecks of dirt = earth



constructs
animated by empty spirits
some purpose

EARTH earth graveyard belched up these things

owner killed -
worms and insects on clumps
human blood used to rise
the follower?
mushrooms etc ↓
why did they kill



other bones stick out?

homunculi?

Dead work followers?

EVAN DORKIN: "Some very rough sketches of the skull golems I doodled in my notebook while plotting the fourth issue. Normally I don't send Jill any design ideas; if you look at her art, and look at mine, you'll understand why."

RIGHT: A little group shot I did of the gang that I ended up making into a print to give to fans at book signings. I think it conveys each character's personality pretty well. You get a sense of what each guy is all about.

FACING: Hellboy creator Mike Mignola graciously puts us over on the cover of the Previews catalog, she said using wrestling lingo...

FOLLOWING PAGE: An ad that ran in other Dark Horse books.



\$3²⁵
US
\$4⁷⁸
CAN

THE COMIC
SHOP'S
CATALOG

PREVIEWS

*"The World's Greatest
Paranormal Detective
has been replaced."*

—Mike Mignola



Evan
DORKIN

Jill
THOMPSON

BEASTS OF BURDEN™

Beasts of Burden™ © 2009 Evan Dorkin and Jill Thompson. Dark Horse Comics® and the Dark Horse logo are trademarks of Dark Horse Comics, Inc., registered in various categories and countries. All rights reserved.

darkhorse.com



HAVE YOU SEEN THESE ANIMALS?



FIND THE *BEASTS OF BURDEN* AT YOUR LOCAL COMICS SHOP



Discover the earliest *Beasts of Burden* stories for
free at www.darkhorse.com/beastsofburden.



JILL THOMPSON

EVAN DORKIN



TO FIND A COMICS SHOP IN YOUR AREA, CALL 1-888-266-4226

For more information or to order direct visit darkhorse.com or call 1-800-862-0052

Beasts of Burden™ © 2009 Evan Dorkin and Jill Thompson. Dark Horse Comics® and the Dark Horse logo are trademarks of Dark Horse Comics, Inc., registered in various categories and countries. All rights reserved.



WELCOME TO BURDEN HILL— A PEACEFUL SUBURB LIKE ANY OTHER WITH WHITE PICKET FENCES AND VIBRANT GREEN GRASS—HOME TO AN UNLIKELY TEAM OF PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS.

BLACK MAGIC, DEMONIC FROGS, AND ZOMBIE ROADKILL are just a few of the problems plaguing this seemingly sleepy little town. With the human residents unaware of the danger, it's up to a determined crew of dogs (and one cat) to keep their community safe.

Horror, adventure, mystery, and humor thrive on every page of *Beasts of Burden*, which promises to capture readers' hearts and haunt their dreams.

Award-winning comics creators Evan Dorkin (*Milk & Cheese*) and Jill Thompson (*Scary Godmother*) come together to share the lives of some unlikely heroes, first introduced in *The Dark Horse Book of Hauntings*, for which Dorkin and Thompson won coveted Eisner awards for Best Short Story and Best Painter. *Animal Rites* collects those earliest tales, along with the four-issue comic series *Beasts of Burden*.

"For pet lovers and enthusiasts of supernatural mysteries, the series is an absolute must . . . The surprise factor within this series is not the suspense or horror, but rather the emotional resonance that the writing and illustrations create . . . *Beasts of Burden* is one of the comic book highlights of 2009."

—USA Today

"*Beasts of Burden* is amazing! Jill and Evan take a bow. Or perhaps a bow-wow . . ."

—Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen*)

"[*Beasts of Burden* is] rapidly becoming one of my favorite comics. Nice job."

—Neil Gaiman (*The Sandman*)

@neilhimsel on Twitter

"*Beasts of Burden* balances humor, heart and horror and fosters the contrast necessary to elevate a genre."

—MTV

"Horror buffs and animal lovers alike will find a lot to like about [*Beasts of Burden's*] tightly-scripted storylines, beautiful illustrations, and appealing characters."

—School Library Journal

"I never thought I'd feel this way about anything with talking dogs in it . . . but *Beasts of Burden* is my favorite new comic."

—Eric Powell (*The Goon*)

"Dorkin's script captures the well-meaning, dopey sentiments we attribute to our dogs and cats' thoughts, and Thompson's art finds a middle ground between storybook sweetness and EC Comics chills. It's a lot of fun, and ideal for kids who don't mind a little gore and ghosts with their adorable animals."

—The Onion, AV Club



GRAPHIC NOVEL / HORROR / MYSTERY • darkhorse.com

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ VOLUME I ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦